

VZCZCXRO3981
PP RUEHDE
DE RUEHJI #0382/01 1431006
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 231006Z MAY 06
FM AMCONSUL JEDDAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9186
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1394
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1472
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 6518
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000382

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

RIYADH, PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN; PARIS FOR ZEYA; LONDON FOR
TSOU; DEPARTMENT FOR CA/EX, CA/OCS/ACS/NESA, NEA/ARP

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [CASC](#) [PHUM](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: RESOLUTION OF JEDDAH REFUGE CASE HIGHLIGHTS
WEAKNESS OF INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE

REF: A. JEDDAH 61

- [1](#)B. JEDDAH 117
- [1](#)C. STATE 22041
- [1](#)D. STATE 35770
- [1](#)E. STATE 55143
- [1](#)F. RIYADH 2309

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: Following the visit of A/S Harty to Saudi Arabia on May 13 and 14, high-level SAG attention to the refuge case of Rema Al Said, which had been languishing for over three months, resulted in a sudden flurry of negotiations between the Mission and representatives from the Interministerial Committee (IC). After signing a statement on May 16 relinquishing custody of her five children and guaranteeing her visitation rights, Al Said was granted a divorce from her husband on May 17 and departed early the next morning. A last minute problem at the airport emigration office led to the personal intervention of the Deputy Minister of Interior Ahmed Al Salem, demonstrating the SAG's heightened interest in the case in the run-up to the May 18 meeting of the US-Saudi Strategic Dialogue between the Secretary and FM Prince Saud Al Faisal. The ultimately successful resolution of the case, however, provided no assurances that the IC has been sufficiently empowered to guarantee the basic right of women to travel freely in the future. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. Al Said came to ConGen Jeddah on February 6 seeking refuge and assistance in leaving Saudi Arabia (reftels A, B, and C). She alleged that her husband had subjected her to severe psychological abuse, that he had beaten her in the past, and that he continued to threaten her with physical abuse. She had asked for a divorce and permission to leave Saudi Arabia, but he had refused. On February 8, Embassy Riyadh sent an urgent Diplomatic Note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) requesting that Al Said be issued an exit visa to return to the US. On March 5, A/S Harty sent a letter to the IC urging the issuance of Al Said's exit visa as expeditiously as possible (reftel D). On April 8, the Secretary sent a letter to FM Prince Saud Al Faisal,

SIPDIS
requesting his personal assistance in resolving the matter (reftel E). Nevertheless, efforts to secure Al Said's departure from Saudi Arabia had stalled.

A/S' VISIT SPURS SAG INTO ACTION

13. Al Said was one of two American women granted refuge a Mission facilities pending SAG action on USG requests that they be issued exit visas to depart th Kingom and return to the US. A/S Harty addressed these cases in a series of meetings with SAG ffficials on May 13 to 14. As a result of the metings, the SAG proposed that Al Said sign a statement relinquishing custody of her children, while securing her full visitation rights in the future, in order to resolve divorce and custody proceedings commenced by her husband in early April, which had languished in sharia court for the intervening six weeks. IC representatives were subsequently dispatched to Jeddah to meet with Al Said and her estranged husband, Mohammed bin Ishaq Al Mekhy.

14. Throughout the day on May 15, consular staff were in contact with IC representatives, who said they were having difficulty finding Al Mekhy despite repeated calls to his home. During one discussion, the IC representative from the MFA explained that he had told Al Mekhy's mother that he had until the end of the day to meet with them and to turn over Al Said's Jordanian passport, which she had used to enter the country. After that point, the IC threatened to involve the police. NOTE: It is unclear whether the police ultimately became involved in transferring the passport from Al Mekhy to the IC or if the MFA representative was simply trying to demonstrate to the Mission the seriousness with which the SAG had begun treating the issue. END NOTE

SAG REQUESTS STATEMENT ON CUSTODY

15. Later on May 15, following the recovery of Al Said's passport and lengthy meetings with Jeddah Governor Prince Mishaal bin Majid bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, IC representatives met with Riyadh Deputy Consul General, Conoff, and Al Said to discuss the contents of the proposed statement. Lasting into the early hours of May 16, these negotiations yielded a draft

JEDDAH 00000382 002.2 OF 002

acceptable to all parties, and Al Said signed the statement. (NOTE: The official English translation of the letter follows below.) IC representatives provided assurances that the letter would allow for Al Said's expeditious divorce and indicated that she would thus be granted immediate exit permission as she would no longer have sponsorship to remain in the country.

16. Al Said's statement was presented to the sharia court on May 16. Per the request of the officiating judge, Al Said appeared in court on May 17 to recount the contents of the statement, to verify that she had not been coerced into signing it, and to confirm that she wanted a divorce. The divorce was granted within hours. Upon leaving the court, IC representatives presented her with her Jordanian passport, which contained a final exit permit.

HIGH-LEVEL INTERVENTION NEEDED TO CLEAR LAST MINUTE HURDLE

17. Al Said was scheduled to leave in the early morning of May 18. However, upon proceeding through emigration control at the airport, she was taken to secondary emigration processing, ostensibly to file the appropriate paperwork for a final exit. She and the accompanying consular staff were assured that this was routine. Shortly before her flight, the emigration supervisor suddenly announced that she would be unable to exit the country because the computer system indicated that she was still married and did not have the required exit permission.

18. After repeated attempts to contact IC representatives, Conoff was able to speak by phone to Deputy Minister of the Interior Ahmed Al Salem, who overrode the airport officials

and secured an entirely new set of airlines reservations for Al Said within 30 minutes. She departed Saudi Arabia at 3:00am on May 18 and arrived in the US later that day.

¶9. COMMENT: Given that Al Said's case was only solved following the direct intervention of the Secretary, A/S Harty, the SAG FM, the SAG Minister of the Interior, and, at the final moment, the SAG Deputy Minister of the Interior, the IC's efficacy has been called into question in spite of the case's successful resolution. In contrast to the MFA's continued assertions that the IC was established specifically to expedite such cases, there are continuing indications that it does not have the bureaucratic muscle to ensure the basic right of women to depart freely from the country (see reftel F).

TEXT OF REMA AL SAID'S STATEMENT

¶10. I, Rima F. M. Al Said, holding Jordanian passport number I305607, issued in Jeddah, hereby certify that I am competent and sane and legally agree to give up my rights to the custody of my five children to their father, Mohammed bin Ishaq Al Mekhy, Saudi national, in exchange for getting my divorce legally from him, provided he will continually allow me to call them and visit them whenever I wish. In the case of his death, the custody of my children will be transferred to me to live with them in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and to all the above I sign, Rima F.M. Al Said.
Gfoeller